



# ISSANJI

## HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

57 Hartford Street, San Francisco, California, 94114  
[www.hartfordstreetzen.com](http://www.hartfordstreetzen.com)

(415) 863-2507

— FALL/WINTER 2000 —

Hartford Street Zen Center is a small Buddhist temple of the Soto Zen tradition situated in the heart of the Castro district. We offer a daily schedule of Zen Buddhist meditation, sitting instruction, Saturday Public lectures, and mid-day sittings for the HIV community and caregivers. HSZC was started in 1981 by a group of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners to serve everyone in the neighborhood. It is also called Issanji, One Mountain Temple, after our founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. The resident teacher is Zenshin Philip Whalen.

## Identity Politics

by Dave Joko Haselwood

*Excerpts from his talk at HSZC, July 15th 2000. Dave Joko Haselwood studied with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi in the early 60's and, after a long hiatus, with Jakusho Kwong Roshi at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center where he was ordained as a priest. Currently, he leads a sitting group in Cotati and visits various teachers during a year of 'wandering'. He is guest speaker at Hartford Zen Center on the second Saturday of each month.*

I'm going to talk today about something that is a tiny aspect of what is to me the big question in Buddhism, the question that is at the core of all Buddhist practice. And that question is, simply: "Who am I?" Actually this isn't even a question; "Who am I" is a statement. What brought me to consider this as the subject of a talk is a certain phrase I've run into frequently in the San Francisco newspapers over the past

year. That phrase is: "identity politics."

When you look at this phrase from the Zen point of view, you can see two sides to it. On what could be called the positive side, "identity politics" means that all the minority people in a society who have been marginalized, trivialized, persecuted, or what have you, begin to stand up for their right to be who they are. This is wonderful, and when this prevails in a society, pluralism prevails in a big way. There are many types of people and many ways, and each has its own legitimate aspect. That is the good side of identity politics.

But there is another side to identity politics that we sometimes overlook, and that side can be very divisive. Divisiveness comes about when you identify with your identity, strange as that may sound. You can become so completely attached to your sense of Identity, whatever you think it is — mother, boy scout,



Steve Allen holding Issan's picture at the 10 year memorial service

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teacher, gay — that you forget about the great web of being that interlocks everything and you isolate yourself from a big chunk of the universe. Our interconnection IS everything, but when we go off on a particular tangent and lose our true self in some identity, our noble cause becomes a trap. Bankei, a very great Zen teacher in Seventeenth Century Japan, said in a sermon, *"Its only your ignorance of the Buddha mind that makes you go on transforming it into a hungry ghost, fighting spirit, or animal. You turn it into this and into that, into all manner of things and then you become those things."*

Not too long ago I was sitting sesshin and suddenly my focus fell on a process that was going on all the time in my mind. What I saw was like an old movie with all these different characters, and believe me, a person has thousands of them in one moment of life. These identities started flashing in front of me. I can't remember what they all were — father, husband, guy that gives Buddha talks, this, that — all these different identities. And I saw that at any point each one of these identities was like a glue pot and all I had to do was jump in and, bingo, there I was. That was my identity. Every one of those identities was a glue pot into which I could jump and become stuck.

There is a story in the *Mumonkan*, a famous collection of koans, that is simply this: *"Wu-tzu asked a monk, 'The woman Ch'ien split her soul. Which was the true Ch'ien?'"* So I ask you, which of the identities I experienced while sitting was the true Dave? (At this point, the story transmitted by Lafcadio Hearne on which this koan is based was read. You will find it in Robert Aitken's *The Gateless Barrier*, a commentary on and translation of the *Mumonkan*).

Wu-men, the teacher who compiled the *Mumonkan*, made this comment on the story of Ch'ien: *"If you realize the true one, then you'll know that emerging from one husk and entering another is like a traveler putting up at an inn."* That is the nature of these identities or personae. They are only temporary places where the true self lodges because at that moment that is what is required. But the moment we cling to one of these identities we are in trouble. Wu-men continues: *"If this is still not clear, don't rush about recklessly. When you suddenly separate into earth, water, fire, and air, you'll be like a crab dropped into boiling water, struggling with your seven hands and eight legs. Don't say I never told you."*

Wu-men completes his commentary with a poem:

*The clouds and the moon are the same,  
The valleys and the mountains are individually  
different.*

*Myriad blessings, myriad blessings--  
Are they one or two?*

I think its very important to penetrate this lesson because otherwise we are always going to be stuck in some identity and unable to meet the reality of the present, living moment. We should meet that moment without any preconceptions of who we are, without any pre-set program of "this is who I am, and this is what this moment is". The only way we are going to be able to do this is by seeing clearly that these identities are simply flickering images that we attach to out of fear or desire. When we attach to one of these images, we make it our identity and that identity becomes a cage, a trap in which we are caught.

## HSZC NEWS

**I**ssan's 10 Year Memorial Service was held in early September. Its a good thing the zendo was re-modeled last spring because the old floor probably would have collapsed under the nearly "standing room only" crowd! (Including six of Issan's seven sisters). **Steve Allen**, former HSZC abbot, lead the ceremony and set a great tone that was touching, inspiring and full of ease (like Issan). **David Bullock**, former HSZC priest, prepared the food for the festival after the ceremony with help from **Will Sprietsma**, **Bruce Boone** and **Michael Palumbo**. A few days before the memorial, a giant willow tree in an adjacent garden toppled over, crashed through the fence and bonsai'd the ginkgo tree planted fifteen years ago in memory of **JD**, Issan's first Maitri resident.

In the future, we will celebrate Issan's birthday rather than performing a monthly memorial service.

**Zenshin Philip Whalen**, our resident teacher, has been in hospital since late October. Please keep him in your thoughts as he recovers his health.

A fond goodbye to former resident **Denis Rodriguez** who moved out last August and warm welcome to new resident **Ian McCaen**, visiting from Ireland to study spiritual psychology at CIIS. HSZC's new head monk,



**Ottmar Engel**, is expected to arrive from Germany the end of December. Be sure to drop by and say hello.

HSZC is holding its first ever *Rohatsu sesshin*, December 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>.

**The HIV Sitting Group** Remembers **Tighe Foley** who passed away last August at age 44. Born in Virginia, Tighe was a long time resident of SF and executive director of Positive Resources, a non-profit agency that places HIV positive people in jobs. Tighe's kind heart, infectious spirit and wit remains in our practice forever.

**Community Thrift Store** 625 Valencia St. at 17<sup>th</sup>, 415-861-4910. Please keep your donations of old clothes, furniture, and books coming. Drop off donations at the side door on Sycamore Alley, and register them to HSZC, account #155.

#### **Newsletter Production**

*Donations to help cover Newsletter production and mailing costs are always appreciated.*

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Post Office delivery: **Don Herald**.

## **Philip is Unwell**

by **Carl Jerome**

*Based on "Baso is Unwell" from Blue Cliff Verses by Richard von Sturmer.*

Sun-faced Buddha:  
banana split  
bubbly root beer  
Cheetos fingers.

Moon-faced Buddha:  
morphine drips  
soiled bedpans  
bacterial infections.

On the bedside table  
a cup of water holds  
the early-morning light.



Zenshin (sitting) with Paul Rosenblum at Issan's Memorial

## **Issan's Memorial**

by **Michael Palumbo**

**I**ssan's ceremony was wonderful and moving and he was there. It was palpable. I had never been to a Zen ceremony before. It was beautiful and strange. The most important part for me was when **Steve Allen** asked us to share experiences of Issan. Most people shared funny stuff. Issan must have been a hoot (among other things). I never met him, I only have what I learned from the book *Street Zen*, and the experience of feeling somehow connected to him, and accepting him as my teacher. The celebration at Maitri that evening was warm and touching. Issan's spirit seemed very alive there and it didn't seem strange to them that Issan's spirit had come right out of the pages of *Street Zen* and touched me so deeply so that I would feel drawn to find HSZC and Maitri Hospice. Then to come back from Philadelphia for his memorial.



## Maitri Update

by Cecilia Tom

*Call (415) 558-3000 for information on volunteering and donations.*

**D**ressed as one of the Village People - in fact, half of our office staff were dressed as the Village People - **Bill Musick** took his last bow on the Maitri center stage as Executive Director, amidst some skeletons and hollowed-out pumpkins and all the usual suspects of Halloween (nuns, priests, drag queens - you know). So after 3 ½ years of leading Maitri through the not-so-easy transition and relocation from HSZC to Duboce Avenue, Bill is moving on. Financially and programmatically, Maitri has profited immensely from Bill's inspired management and vision. Of course we have separation anxieties and abandonment issues but during our search for Bill's replacement, **Traci Teraoka Patel**, our Board president for the last three years, will assume the position of Interim Executive Director. It will be very nice to have such a gentle and motivated soul around.

In September, we hosted a dinner for Issan's sisters, who were in town for his memorial service. A sumptuous buffet was donated by Tin Pan Restaurant, and we had a fun time hanging out with the Dorsey family and trying to remember their names. **Steve Allen**, our first Executive Director, also dropped by with his wife **Angelique**. Earlier that week, we held our annual volunteer appreciation party aboard a cruise ship. Each volunteer was presented with the newest edition of *Street Zen*, Issan's biography. So again and again, we're reminded of Issan's legacy of love and compassion for people with AIDS. Bill always says that Maitri should be the place where each one of us would want to stay should we be suffering from a similarly debilitating illness. If we can continue to bear this high standard in mind, we'll be able to carry on Issan's mission and build on the strong foundation that Bill has created for Maitri.

## AIDS Ride

Remembered by Patsy Dorsey

**N**ow that the 2000 Aids Ride has come to a conclusion, I am left with photographs, stories, and special memories. It also bestowed upon me

a true appreciation and understanding of what my brother meant to so many in need of a caring heart. From the very beginning I knew that this trip would be emotionally exhausting, but I never imagined how uplifting and exhilarating it would also be. Tears of joy, sadness, tears of every emotion known flowed without restraint.

My journey began with the trip to San Francisco, the starting point for the ride. My foremost objective was to visit the Maitri Hospice for Aids Patients, founded by Issan in 1987. Maitri is a Sanskrit word meaning "compassionate friendship", which encompasses the very essence of this dwelling. Upon my arrival, hugs and heartfelt welcomes from the staff of Maitri greeted me. They led me into the foyer where a shrine-like memorial dedicated to Issan was adorned with candles and pictures, and fragranced with incense. These people revered my brother and later I met others whose lives were also graced by Issan's spirit.

June 4<sup>th</sup>, opening ceremonies and the start of the ride: 2,795 riders and over 300 volunteers, all coming together for a common cause. The ceremony was both vivacious and solemn, people raring to go and at the same time cognizant of each other's reasons for participating. As part of the ceremony, a rider-less bicycle was slowly wheeled out. A voice spoke above the chatter of the crowd, explaining the bicycle's symbolism for riders who have fallen victim to the AIDS virus. And I cried.

At each campsite, a remembrance tent was assembled for anyone to enter. A quiet place to reflect on memories of our lost loved ones. I tried several times to enter the tent, but became enveloped by my emotions and could not bring myself to go inside. One rider told me that it took her three years before she could set foot in the tent. Maybe next year will be mine.

Before the ride, I had T-shirts made with pictures of Issan. One day a volunteer noticed Issan's picture on my shirt and shared her story. Her family had disowned her because she was gay and the rejection provoked self-hatred that almost led to suicide. She went to the Zen Center and Issan taught her to be true to who she was and to love herself while doing so. In essence, he saved her spirit. She gave me her prayer beads to carry on the ride. Another day while standing in line for the porta-potties, a woman came towards me and before I could speak a word, we were engulfed in each other's embrace. She began to cry and so did I. I tried to



comfort her and she told me about her brother who died in the arms of my brother at Maitri. More tears shed and soon the comforting become mutual.

My path crossed with so many who knew Issan, and we will always have him in common. People from all walks of life, different religions and ethnic backgrounds, people who were physically or mentally challenged. They were there. Thanks to the AIDS Ride I now have an idea of what a perfect world would be like. All problems took a back seat during these seven days, and people revealed the true character of what humanity truly stands for: love, compassion, understanding, virtues that really matter. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

# HEART SUTRA ISSAN MONOGATARI (Part 1)

by Bruce Boone

Channeling him, some of his words return. "Don't panic." "You get what you deserve whether you deserve it or not." "Nothing extra." Not just a wisp of words untrailing a life — his, ISSAN's — but this GLOW.

Not an aura or halo either — but a GLOW! Entering a room there's this radiant smile you see lighting up YOU yes but also — EVERYBODY? That's what I remember. This feeling diffusing in your belly till you practically can't stand — THE GLOW.

Even when it stops. Can it be there when STOPPED? Against this is Spicer WHEN THE TAXI DOESN'T MOVE IT DOESN'T MOVE BURN IT. But the flow goes on. ALLEN GINSBERG too, talking about ISSAN's) boyfriend JAMES this time: JAMES is Issan's flat tire. Isn't that the FOIL of — A GLOW?

Everybody's happy in the tea ceremony class with ISSAN and a bunch of old ladies. They're learning this art of a marvelous ancient culture! Then panic. Somebody tells of his — ISSAN's — HIV status and everything's thrown into this — just LOOP or something. How can they put up with it? They kick him out. He

goes: mildly. I say — oh ISSAN it's so bigoted you got to fight it don't you? ISSAN: oh I just told them I HOPE I DIDN'T OFFEND. And that's THE GLOW.

Into this gap — between YOUR intentions and THE GLOW's — steps death. It makes me nervous even now. I think — MY death even? It says EARTH TO BRUCE HELLO! And the GLOW becomes this haunting. A practical joke to play — and do you get it? The doctor tells him — you got only a few months to live. He goes OH I CAN'T DIE NOW I GOT AN ORDINATION TO DO! In the collision and collusion of image and after-image — the GLOW.

So: it becomes HEART. That's what I see in the photo of him at a home altar JAMIE (another, not ISSAN's) made for me. The edge haunting from his Friday evening talks, when this guy keeps coming by. He's a butch taxi driver and drug user and wants to just: stop! Soaking up ISSAN's every word — HANGING on them. But now aren't I ready — he thinks — to make my MOVE? He wants to be ISSAN's student. Can I do it now — be your student? ISSAN: COME BACK WHEN YOU'RE SERIOUS. The LOVE VIBES reaching out-to slap you in the face.

Like the shoe dropping when you die. Famous last words etc. And don't they always look DIFFERENT — down the line? IT'S REALLY FAR OUT OUT THERE he says, from his coma. And the zen guy guarding him laments OH ISSAN I'M REALLY GONNA MISS YOU. No flies grow on that ISSAN tho, even dying. ISSAN: YOU GOING SOMEPLACE? In the time spanning those two places — they're one — but they're the same.

Hell hath no fury like a HELLS ANGEL but can you always KNOW what you know — even then? So there's this pack of them coming toward the elevator in a run-down hotel ISSAN's in, with his student, David. Here they come. We just have time to shut the gate — David thinks. I mean you can't trust ROUGHNECKS like that can you? ISSAN holds the gate open for them, smiling. Come on in!! The water's FINE. So they do. And all ride together — to their stop. ISSAN's chatting them up and a fine time's had by all. They say, nice meeting you ISSAN and DAVID — why don't you come over to dinner some time? As polite as can be — and there they go. Follow your bliss, but FEEL it! (to be continued...)



## Zen Dish

**Email from Bill DeNoyelles:** I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all at HSZC for making my visit to SF a most enjoyable and fruitful one. I enjoyed the Saturday morning talks and the warm welcome I received. I was happy to sit zazen with you and that you all remembered me from my last year's visit. I always get so much from the center and it really feels like "home." On the flight back to New Jersey I read *Street Zen* — Issan sounds like he was quite a guy. I'm so glad his open spirit still shines through your center. So a simple thanks and bow to you.

## Spaciousness of Mind

by Jim Wilson

*Excerpts from his talk at HSZC December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1999. Jim is a Zen teacher in Sonoma of the Chokgye, Fuke and Soto Zen tradition.*

One thing that Zen Master Dogen had great insight into was the merging of practice and enlightenment. He often talked about how practice was not separate from enlightenment and by practice he meant zazen. That insight over the years has enriched me. Take the understanding of compassion for example. How is zazen an expression of compassion? Clinging causes suffering. And zazen is the practice of non-clinging. Whatever arises we allow it to arise, whatever disappears we allow it to disappear. Simply being present in this body and mind is the practice of zazen. Compassion brings an end to the suffering of all sentient beings and ourselves. If we have a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things then one moment of release in zazen is release for all sentient existence. That is the connection between the practice of compassion and our meditation. So Dogen was right. Our practice is a full manifestation of the Dharma.

Another way that I've looked at this is through the Eight-Fold Path. I like to think of this as the Eight-Fold Path of Zazen. The first is "right view", understanding the interdependence of all things. We enter into practice and directly perceive how thoughts and feelings appear, change, disappear. We see how their connectedness and

arising is due to conditions. A spaciousness opens up in our mind — it's our original condition actually but we become aware of it. Our identity is no longer completely crystallized around our conceptions and thoughts. We arise due to certain conditions, endure for a while, then disappear. This doesn't mean I don't exist it's just that I don't exist separately. The experience of right view is available through meditation.

Then there is "right thinking." Thinking without clinging or attachment. For example, sitting in zazen, desire appears, then disappears. The body learns that we do not have to identify with our desires. There is a spaciousness in which desires appear. Clinging to desire becomes craving: "I want something and I will not rest until I get it!" Right thinking understands that our thoughts are part of the natural world just like anything else that appears. Our identity is no longer so securely fixed to an idea.

Then there is "right mindfulness." In concentration forms of meditation we focus on a specific object to bring attention to a single point — observation of breath,



Issan's Memorial Rock in the HSZC Garden



mantras, etc. Spaciousness of mind creates an uncluttered field of awareness where concentration becomes more lucid. In the Soto School, coming to the breath is an interior platform from which to launch into spaciousness of mind. When we get on a mind plane and go somewhere else then we can return to our breath.

"Right action" is number four. Zazen is an activity, the activity of stillness. Being still allows one to get a perspective on what is important and not important. The activity of stillness is being like a mountain, able to comprehend from that long-term perspective. Silence is not the absence of sound. There is always sound going on. Sitting in zazen we hear somebody taking a deep breath, the shuffle of robes, all those sounds manifest. The difference between silence and what we normally experience is the absence of human speech — that is what is being let go of. Can you treat your thoughts with the same equanimity and lightness that you treat the sound of the bell? Arising and disappearing. The silence and stillness of zazen allows us to experience our deep nature with all other things — we are not doing any specific thing to maintain our existence yet here we are. We let go of that strategic attitude towards existence and all of existence breathes us. All of existence is meditating us. Zazen is definitely right action.

The fifth is "right speech." During conversations with people often they are just waiting for us to pause so they can dive in. There is hardly a gap. The silence we practice with zazen allows speech to emerge in the spaciousness that is everywhere. Sitting in zazen, chattering appears, chattering disappears. We do not have to immediately alter the direction of the conversation. Zazen in itself is not right speech because you are not talking but it creates the conditions for right speech.

The sixth point is "right effort," being able to practice regularly. This should not be a tense affair but like the effort to remember a favorite song or poem. Our zazen should have that quality. When we first begin to practice it seems messy. We have to trust that eventually we will experience spaciousness and settling. In the beginning we lean on our teacher, friends, sangha but sometimes practice doesn't seem like its going anywhere. We sit there and are bored. Right effort carries us through these experiences. On the other side we realize that what was going on is not something intellectual consciousness understands... (to be continued)

## From Canoeing up Cabarga Creek

by Philip Whalen

### At Dharma Sangha

We open the zendo at six p.m.  
Sometimes people come.  
Here we are stillness parked in silence  
Great big nothing happens in imaginary void.

In the morning, old paving blocks tip  
as I circumambulate the chörten  
Climbing to Forester Pass, under my boots  
Upstairs in the Villa Borghese  
Tippy marble floor slab (clank)

26:VII, 3:VIII:86

### The Dharma Youth League

I went to visit several thousand gold buddhas  
They sat there all through the war, —  
They didn't appear just now because I happened to be  
in town.

Sat there six hundred years. Failures.  
Does Buddha fail. Do I.  
Some day I guess I'll never learn.

28:XII:66

### Winter Jelly

Now great winter falls  
New Year's full moon blur window fog  
Words in books drop slowly over brainwheel paddles  
which stand  
Clear white ice moon sparkle

28:XII:63

### Grace Before Meat

You food, you animal plants  
I take you now, I make you wise  
Beautiful, and with great joy  
Enlightenment for all sentient beings  
All the hungry spirits, gods and buddhas who are sad

30:V:67

## HSZC Temple Schedule

**H**SZC offers a traditional schedule of Zen meditation. For those new to zazen, beginner's instruction is held every Saturday morning in the zendo from 8:30-9am. There is a public lecture every Saturday at 10am, followed by discussion and tea. All are welcome. Please arrive 10 minutes prior to scheduled times.

**MORNING:** Monday through Friday

6:00am Zazen  
6:40am Service

**EVENING:** Monday through Friday

6:00pm Zazen  
6:40pm Service

**SATURDAY:**

Beginning Zazen instruction is held every Saturday morning from 8:30am until 9:00am.

9:10am Zazen  
10:00am Public Lecture, followed by tea and discussion.  
Donations to support the temple are appreciated.

**Membership** Practicing members sit regularly, attend practice interviews, and contribute a suggested \$40 monthly. Supporting members contribute \$20 or more a year and receive newsletters by mail. A monthly pledge of even \$10 helps the fiscal health of our temple significantly. You are welcome as

a member of our Sangha, and we offer you whatever support you may need in your practice.

## Groups Meeting at HSZC

**HIV Sitting Group** For those with HIV, caregivers, lovers, friends or anyone else who wants to sit with us. Thursday and Friday mornings at 10:30am. Sitting until 11:00am. Brief meditation instruction offered.

**Jim Wilson's "Sutra of Month" Club** meets the last Wednesday of each month, 7:00pm to 9:30pm. Visitors are welcome. Call 707-939-7023 or e-mail jimfw@hotmail.com.

## Schedule of Upcoming Talks and Events

**F**or information, updates and program changes, please see the Hartford Street Zen Center events and calendar web page at: <http://www.hartfordstreetzen.com> or call 415.863.2547.

If you wish to see more of Issan's Memorial photos: visit <http://www.imagestation.com/album/?id=4293465363&code=833379&mode=invite>

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